



(U) Bangladesh: A 'Cocoon of Terror'?

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(S) Experts investigate: "Does Bangladesh have the potential to become the next Afghanistan?"

(S//SI) The SIGINT Black Hole

(S//SI) Back in November 2003, threats were made against the US Embassy in Dhaka, Bangladesh, claiming Al Qaida support and encouragement for attacks. The next month, nine Bangladeshis were arrested on suspicion of planning an attack on a US target in Argentina. Since then, regular threats and attacks have been made against US and other western interests in Bangladesh.

(S//SI) Incidents such as these lead to the obvious questions: what do we know about terrorism in Bangladesh, and what is SIGINT doing to determine this?

(S//SI) In August 2003, the Asia-Pacific CT SIGINT Strategy was drawn up between NSA, DSD and GCSB. The APCTS Strategy aims to support multi-national counterterrorism (CT) missions by providing actionable intelligence to enable effective operations to:

- disrupt and defeat terrorist networks in the Asia-Pacific region,
- deny terrorists sanctuary,
- diminish the capabilities of terrorist organizations and
- defend national homelands.

Under the APCTS Strategy Plan, responsibility for prosecuting CT targets in the region was divided up, and New Zealand's SIGINT agency, GCSB, assumed the lead on Bangladesh CT. This was a "cold start" target, with much potential but little to work from.

(S//SI) In the past two years of target discovery and development, GCSB has worked collaboratively with a wide range of SIGINT, HUMINT and law enforcement agencies within the wider global intelligence community to determine the threat level within Bangladesh. So is the world's third largest Muslim country a true "cocoon of terror" with the potential to become the next Afghanistan?

(U) The Known

(S//SI) While Bangladesh may not be hiding UBL under a burqa, it has been seen as a valid "flee haven" by Al Qaida and other extremist groups in the Asia Pacific region. Before being apprehended in 2003, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) operations chief Hambali had been planning to disappear into Bangladesh. Another JI senior operative, Zulkifli Marzuki, apparently fled to Bangladesh to evade capture. Furthermore, Kashmiri militant group Lashkar-e-Tayyiba also has a presence within Bangladesh.

(S//SI) Terrorists have carried out attacks on a variety of targets in Bangladesh, including religious and cultural facilities and political rallies. While most attacks on secular or "un-Islamic" targets have been domestically focused, some Non-Governmental Organizations with foreign affiliations have been targeted. Extremist propaganda has become increasingly anti-western over the past 12 months, including renewed threats levied against US persons in the country.

(S//SI) The prevalence of violent incidents within Bangladesh has been enough cause for concern about the activities of Islamic fundamentalists to raise the NIPF* on Bangladesh CT. The US Government and its allies are concerned at the rise of militancy in South Asia, particularly in light of such indicators of extremism in Bangladesh. Conditions are ripening and we do not want

to be caught off guard.

(U) The Unknown

(C) The Bangladesh Government is publicly committed to the global war on terror but, with a general election set for 2006, the Government needs to keep on side its fundamental Islamic political partners to remain in power. Given documented support and protection afforded to extremist groups by these parties, it is unknown what real measures the Government will take to shut down terrorist organizations.

(C) Further understanding of the target set is needed before the threat level can be comprehensively determined for long-term SIGINT planning. Who are the really "bad guys"? To what extent are they driven and funded by external forces? These questions remain only partially answered at present.

(U) Conclusion

(S//SI) Bangladesh is no longer the "SIGINT black hole" it was two years ago. A great deal is now known about its communications networks, groups of interest and potential threats. This work has lead us to assess that a terrorist attack on western interests in Bangladesh is certainly possible, but it is not expected in the short term. Nonetheless, GCSB, together with SIGINT, HUMINT and law enforcement partners, will remain committed to the successful prosecution of the mission - that is, to disrupt, defeat, deny, diminish and defend against terrorist operations in Bangladesh.

(S//SI) To this end, on 15-16 August 2005, a Bangladesh Conference is being held at NSA that will draw all those interested in Bangladesh to the table. This will include managers and analysts from NSA, SCS, CIA, DIA, JICPAC*, JIATF-W*, State INR and 2nd Party Partners - GCHQ, DSD and GCSB. NSA and GCSB are co-hosting this conference that will produce clear customer guidance and a way ahead that can be factored back into the APCTS.

*(U) Notes:

NIPF = National Intelligence Priorities Framework

JICPAC = Joint Intelligence Center - Pacific

JIATF-W = Joint Interagency Task Force West



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